City of Alexandria

Independent Evaluation of the Alexandria Fund for Human Services

City Council Legislative Meeting

June 10, 2025

Agenda

Summary of Presentation

Review of the Alexandria Fund for Human Services (AFHS)

Presentation of the Independent Review of the AFHS

- Background
- Scope & Methodology
- Recommendations
- Next Steps

Summary

Request

- Receive the AFHS Evaluation conducted by an external evaluator.

Council Action

- Consider the recommendations as outlined in the document.
- Set the AFHS Evaluation for public hearing on Saturday June 14, 2025.

Key Elements

- Review of the four recommendations aimed to respond directly to City Council request to conduct an evaluation of the AFHS.

About the AFHS

- Allows for the expansion of the City's human service delivery system through a competitive grant-making process.
- Funds non-profit partners in the community providing vital services to residents.
- Enables non-profits to support the mission and vision of DCHS.
- Responds to the key human service-related strategic plans being implemented across the City.
- Services are provided across all ages and human service conditions.
- The $1.9m annual appropriation supports 48-programs.
- In FY24 more than 30,000 individuals were served using AFHS funding.

AFHS Independent Review

- Background
- Scope & Methodology
- Recommendations
- Next Steps

AFHS Independent Review: Background

- Council requested a review of the FY 2024-2026 process.

- Following the briefing then City Councilwoman Gaskins on behalf City Council provided a memorandum directing staff to “review, reexamine and explore” and to address the following key five areas:
  - ✓ Scale of human services needs in the City of Alexandria
  - ✓ Intended result of the AFHS
  - ✓ Essential services needed to address the intended result
  - ✓ Best channels/mechanisms to support these essential services
  - ✓ Process for evaluating the success and impact of the fund.

AFHS Independent Review: Background
(continued)

- The memo also outlined key elements of the research:
  - Use of outside consultant support
  - Should be completed in partnership with community partners and stakeholders
  - Consider the practices of neighboring jurisdictions with similar processes for nonprofits
  - Present the findings from the report to Council and a public hearing for community response.
- Selected Evaluator: Community Science, a MWBE that has more than 25 years of experience providing consultation, research and evaluation and strategy development to foundations, nonprofit organizations and governments

AFHS Independent Review: Community Science Scope & Methodology

Evaluation Design & Data Collection: In partnership with DCHS staff, Community Science developed an evaluation and data collection process using a mixed methods approach, integrating qualitative and quantitative data to address the research questions.

Landscape & Document Scan: Review of current AFHS practices, public data, academic and practioner literature to provide context on AFHS's scope and funding mechanisms for essential human services.

Stakeholder Focus Groups & Interviews: Conducted Focus Groups with the City's non-profit partners; conducted interviews with DCHS program staff to seek their understanding and perspective on essential service delivery and grants process.

Neighboring Jurisdictions Interviews: Conducted interviews to provide comparative insights into funding mechanisms and best practices.

Survey: Community partners responded to a survey to capture data to further explore their perceptions of essential services, the AFHS, and funding recommendations.

AFHS Independent Review: Recommendations

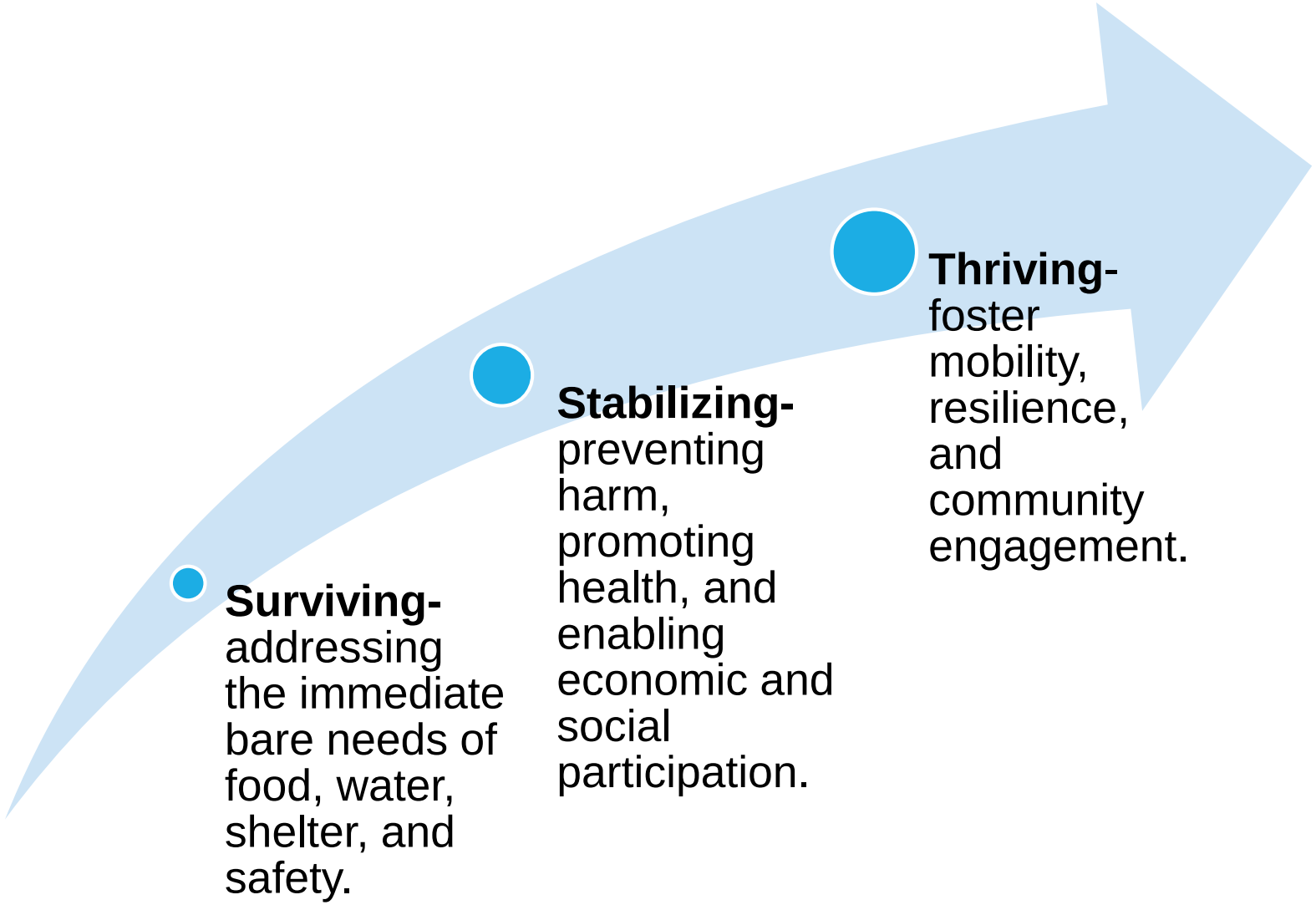
Recommendation 1: Adopt the proposed Essential Human Services (EHS) definition.

Essential Human Services (EHS)*:*

Essential Human Services (EHS) are those that meet the fundamental needs necessary for survival, stability, and well-being. Rather than a dichotomous classification of essential or not, services exist on a spectrum. At the most basic level, they ensure ***survival*** *by addressing the immediate bare needs of food, water, shelter, and safety. The next level supports continued survival or* ***stability*** *by preventing harm, promoting health, and enabling economic and social participation. At the highest level, they foster, mobility, resilience, and community engagement — collectively known as* ***thriving****. Rather than a fixed set of services, EHS depend on contextual factors such as geography, culture, and societal conditions.*

AFHS Independent Review: Recommendations

Recommendation 1- Essential Human Services (EHS) definition.



- The proposed definition will provide the City of Alexandria with a clear, consistent, and comprehensive framework for funding decisions.
- It ensures alignment across stakeholders, fosters a shared understanding of priorities, and improves communication by creating a common language for discussions.
- Grounded in both the literature and stakeholder consensus, it also aligns with principles used in other jurisdictions.

AFHS Independent Review: Recommendations

Recommendation 2: Restructure the AFHS for greater impact.

- Use competitive grants to fund programs that focus primarily on stabilizing and thriving community well-being.
- Require AFHS recipients to provide novel service delivery that is not duplicative of other services offered in the community and partnerships amongst community partners.
- Prioritize one to two key service areas per cycle: Instead of spreading funds too thin, focus on the most urgent community needs based on a data-driven assessment.
- Make fewer and larger grants to maximize impact. Increase individual award amounts to maximize program impact rather than funding numerous small projects.
- Continue and maintain a three (3)-year grant cycle.
- Enhance performance monitoring and accountability to allow for data-informed decision making.
- Employ direct contracts outside of the AFHS process for persistent conditions related to survival not otherwise available in the community. For communities and conditions where funding disruption would create instability for critical services.

AFHS Independent Review: Recommendations

Recommendation 3: Explore the feasibility of increasing the total amount of the AFHS funding to meet demand.

- The AFHS funds have remained static for a decade while the demand and the cost of delivering essential services in the community have increased.
- Introduce a Cost-of-living adjustment for multi-year grants to ensure service continuity.

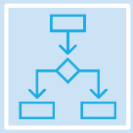
Recommendation 4: Grant Application and Review Process

- Publish a clear application rubric.
- Enhance the review process transparency.
- Ensure sufficient timeframe for the application process.
- Provide structured post-application support.

AFHS Independent Review: Next Steps

As directed by City Council, set the AFHS Evaluation for public hearing for Saturday June 14, 2025.

Respond to City Council guidance, community feedback and develop an operational plan for the FY 27-29 grant cycle.



The plan will be developed and submitted to Council in September of 2025 that will address the feasibility of the recommendations and the most effective methods to respond to community needs.

The changes will be reflected in the FY 27-29 grant cycle.